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Pedal mettle

Owings Mills' Buzz Levin has been cycling for 21 years to raise money for cancer research | **Page 3**



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A good time

Baltimore's international festival draws scores from around the area for good times and good eats

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The Jeffersonian

Serving Baltimore County

Where badminton is more than just a summer backyard game

By Jon Meoli
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The skill level displayed by the Loch Raven Badminton Club on Friday nights hardly resembles the version most commonly associated with the sport.

"Most Americans think of badminton as a backyard barbecue game," Ed Smith, 78 of Lutherville, said. "We still have fun, but we're a little more serious than that."

Well, maybe more than a little.

Players for the club, which meets weekly at the Northeast Regional Recreation Center on Oakleigh Road in Parkville, are a cut well above what one might find at a typical neighborhood picnic.

Members play on eight regulation-sized courts and enjoy a family-oriented atmosphere that allows children to learn a sport that

could last a lifetime.

At the adult play session on Friday, July 29, the children were relegated to the sidelines, hitting among themselves while the grown-ups secured the main courts.

But at the family play session the next morning, the children were the center of attention, playing beside the adults on the

club's roll-out courts.

Charles Zhang, 11, of White Marsh, and Ari Wu, 12, of Lutherville, played on one court with abandon, sacrificing finesse and shot-making for sheer power.

Charles joined the 'club in 2008 at the urging of his mother, and said the sport is a good way to get exercise. He and Ari played

beside older family members,

To be sure, the adults playing on the surrounding courts influence them. They give Elliot Strahan, 10 of Towson, the incentive to improve.

"I want to be as good as they are," he said,

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Young players hone skills at Loch Raven badminton club

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motioning over to the court beside where he and another boy were taking lessons.

Elliot began playing in his backyard in the summer of 2008 when his mother, Kelly Hom, found the Loch Raven club on the Internet.



PHOTO BY STEVE RUARK

Song Shi of Reisterstown, left, returns a shuttlecock as Xuesong Jiang of Lutherville looks on during the Loch Raven Badminton Club's family play time on July 16.

Since then, Elliot has taken lessons with club president Richard Shingles and improved every facet of his game. Shingles puts the children through drills that work on their different strokes from each part of the court. One drill that takes particular skill required the players to hit backhand shots into an equipment bag just under the net — a feat Elliot achieved several times.

And his practice has paid off. At the Maryland Junior Open in April, Elliot placed fourth in his age group in singles and second in the doubles bracket.

Charles and Elliot both hope to play for their high schools when the time comes, a future goal to which all the young players at the club may strive.

Our club helps the quality of the high school play locally," Smith said. "We have really good people here, and that's how young people learn."

Baltimore County is one of the few areas in the country that offers badminton as an interscholastic sport. Some players, such as Steven Iringan, 16, of Baltimore, and Nurit

Kedir, 15, of Perry Hall, have been using the club to prepare for the upcoming high school season.

Nurit played Friday with Amanda Hallock, 17, of Pikesville, who has played at Garrison Forest School In Owings Mills since seventh grade and began with the club this summer. Nurit, who will try out for her high school team in a few weeks, just recently began playing and said the game is "harder than it looks."

"You run a lot if you're playing singles," she said.

While the prep season doesn't begin until the spring, now that she's found the club, badminton has become an even bigger part of her life.

"I love it," Haddock said. "It's my favorite part of the day."

Smith, who has been with the club for 35 years and playing organized badminton for much longer, has seen the club grow from its modest beginnings.

"There were far fewer people and lower skill levels back then," Smith said.

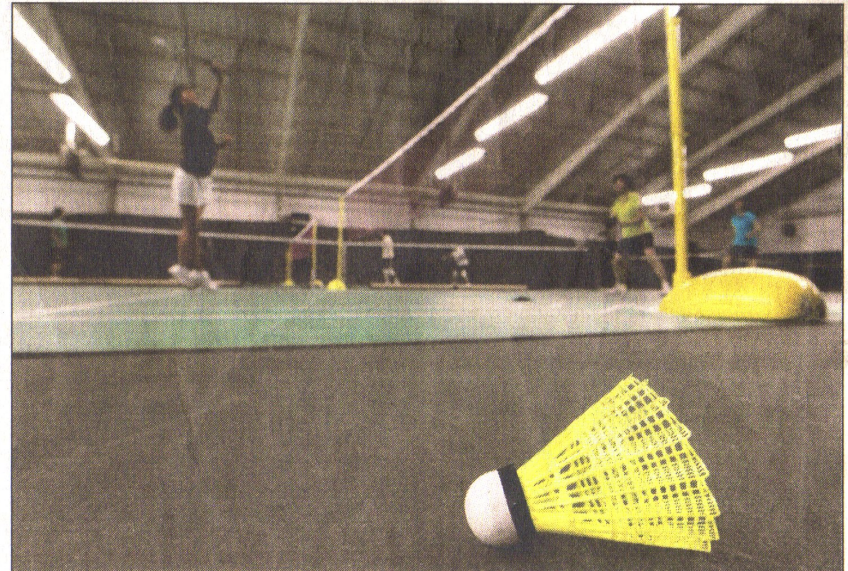


PHOTO BY STEVE RUARK

A shuttlecock lies near a court during the Loch Raven Badminton Club's family play time at the Northeast Regional Recreation Center on July 16.